

This morning's readings are very 'hard hitting' and powerful.

Quite scary really.

Both talk of money and wealth.

Because there is a link, we shall begin with a quick look at the Gospel reading. Then we will focus on Amos and his message. And what it means for us today.

Our Gospel reading is familiar. This wealthy young man felt something was missing.

Even though he had plenty, and more besides. Something was missing and quantity could not fill the emptiness of quality. In that time, it was believed, all those riches meant God was blessing their way of life and their faith. But Jesus turned it upside down. And the young man's reluctance to give it all up and follow Jesus showed his inability to actually keep the first commandment, to let nothing be more important than God.

Wealth itself is not evil but our reliance on it is. Anything that comes first is a barrier to our serving and following Jesus.

My favourite verse is v27 '... With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.'

I suspect many of you, like me, have hung onto this verse in seemingly impossible situations.

This statement is hope in all its promise and glory.

Our Amos reading is just a small portion of a punchy little book in the old testament.

Having never looked at or studied Amos, it's been a great opportunity for me to investigate and research into the who, what and why??!

This is what I have learnt.....

There are 12 minor prophets in OT (interesting when we think of the importance/significance of this number - 12 tribes of Israel, 12 disciples)

Amos was the first to have his written down.

He is known as God's prophet of Justice.

He was not the son of a prophet. He was not the son of a Priest

He was a humble shepherd; doing his job, providing for his family and worshipping his God in Tekoa, 6 miles south of Bethlehem and 10 miles south-east of Jerusalem.

Around 950 BCE after Solomon's death, Israel split into 2 Kingdoms. Jeroboam established himself as king of the northern kingdom and Rehoboam was king of Judah.

Yahweh (Hebrew name for God) had made it clear that people were to worship at only one place, which was later known as Jerusalem, and only Levites were to be priests.

Jeroboam disobeyed and set up temple sanctuaries in Dan and Bethel, so the northern tribes did not have to travel through Judah to Jerusalem. He set up his own priesthood and system of sacrifices and feasts.

He created calf idols for the people to worship.

For approx 200 yrs the northern kingdom was ruled by ungodly kings, disloyal to Yahweh, and the people practised a mix of paganism and worship of God -syncretic worship.

During those 200 yrs the northern kingdom experienced peace and prosperity, also great social inequality. There was a stark contrast between the luxury of the rich and the misery of the poor.

As Amos 'shepherded' around, God spoke to him.

And called him to be His mouthpiece.

Amos was most disturbed by the hypocrisy of the religious rich. Their apparent devotion to God in their religious festivals was contradicted by their ruthless exploitation of the poor.

Despite their beautiful, and devoted worship it was not lived out in protecting the poor and upholding justice in the courts. God hates empty meaningless worship that goes through the motions and has no impact on a person's life.

Such worship is a disgusting insult to God.

1 John4 v20 'He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.'

Like the Gospel reading, they assumed their wealth and 'practices' gave them right standing with God and so looked forward to 'the Day of The Lord', assuming further privileges ruling over the nations.

Amos prophesied the opposite!

They forfeited their privileged status as God's people, because of their persistent abuse of the poor, despite God's many warnings. The Day of The Lord would bring destruction and judgement. They would be deported from the land.

The book of Amos describes God's reluctant action against those nations that have experienced his grace, but have consistently turned from Him to injustice, immorality, and idolatry.

In the first 6 chapters, Amos challenges the people of the northern kingdom, and the responses to the challenge are in the last third of the book.

So that is the who, what and why! The background.

The verses we have heard and read this morning are part of Amos' third challenge to the leading men of the house of Israel for feasting off the land, abusing the poor through their corrupt judicial system and failing to 'grieve over the ruin of Israel.'

We began with v6 'Seek the Lord and live'.

A sure remedy for a world, sick and dying in sin.

Sin destroys, but hope is found in seeking God.

V14 expands on this by adding that seeking good will give life and the presence of The Lord God Almighty..and he may be merciful if you correct your legal and social system.

This means doing good for others, especially the poor and vulnerable.

Loving God and loving neighbour are an inseparable pair.

It seems quite simple, doesn't it?

Put God first. Seek Him, follow Him.

Reject evil. Stop oppressing the poor. Be fair in court.

The Gospel reading highlights that we are to put God first.

Help and love all, as He does.

He created all and loves all.

This book is about justice.

There is great reassurance in this book for us today.

In a world which seems to be flooded by corruption and injustice; Violence and the abuse of power, we can listen to Amos' words and know that God sees; God will judge; and there will be justice.

Frustrating though this is, we can do our part by seeking God first. Living and behaving well, not simply worshipping beautifully.

To actively care for all around us. To live out the love of Christ that we experience and share what we have. Put God first and love our neighbour.

Amos clearly warns that God hates worship without justice.

This book is an exhortation that all who love Jesus must fight for justice of the oppressed.

His words did come true and the Assyrians defeated the northern kingdom and Samaria and deported the people, and they never properly returned.

Not knowing some parts of the Bible is a great chance to get to know God a bit more. I hope this encourages you to look at parts that are unfamiliar.

Today we have seen that God doesn't miss a thing. The empty places in us were created for Him.

Not money, or wealth, or anything else. He comes first, always.

We need to live out our faith.

God is eternal, and caring for others is loving God.